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Nuclear Issues

1. Saudi-Pakistani Nuclear Agreement?

The United Press International broke the story that Saudi Arabia and Pakistan engaged in a secret nuclear agreement, which drew quite a media and governmental response.

A US State Dept. official stated that there he has "not seen any information to substantiate what would seem to us to be rather bald assertions." A Saudi official also denied the reports: "This story has been going around for 25 years. It is absolutely wrong." Rifaat Hussain, Chairman of the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, told Arab News that Pakistan has "a special arrangement with Saudi Arabia under which Riyadh has been supplying oil to Pakistan on a concessionary rate, but there are no oil-for-weapon agreements between the two countries."

["Nuclear allegations bald assertions: US"](#)

Amidst the controversy of a speculative report of this caliber, the original journalist, Arnaud de Borchgrave, stood by his story. Pramilla Srivastava (South Asia Tribune) questions the veracity and integrity of Borchgrave's report, source, and newspaper. David Jones, foreign editor of the Washington Times (US), defends Borchgrave's report by providing additional evidence in the form of a July 2002 report (included below) by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The report claims that Crown Prince Abdullah sent his son to Pakistan for the test-launch of the surface-t-surface Ghauri missile (range 900 km)

The New York Post (US) claimed that Major General Aharon Zeevi, the Israel Defense Force's senior intelligence officer, told a parliamentary committee that Saudi Arabia had visited Pakistan with the intention of purchasing nuclear warheads, for Saudi land-based missiles. A State Dept. report (included below) by Anthony Cordesman, a former Pentagon official, stated that "Saudi Arabia does not have weapons of mass destruction, it did, however, buy long-range CSS-2 ballistic missiles from China." Anwar Iqbal (United Press International) draws from another US source, a former Defense Intelligence Agent Thomas Woodrow, that Saudi Arabia has been financing Islamabad's nuclear and missile purchases from China. The South Asia Tribune claims that a Saudi security personnel reportedly discovered a bugging device in their hotel during the visit to Pakistan.

An editorial in the Telegraph (India) shifts the focus of the Saudi visit from potential deals to salient comments, but "lost opportunities in Indo-Saudi relations in at least a decade have obscured what is possible for New Delhi to do with Riyadh. Saud's assertion in Islamabad on Indian Muslims is...significant [in] extolling Indian secularism and declaring his faith in the strength of India's constitutional process to safeguard India's Muslims."

2. Pakistan Nuclear Program

Muddassir Rizvi (Inter Press Service) examines the danger of building another nuclear plant in Pakistan without close examination, especially when nuclear safety and water scarcity are further put at risk. The Yomiuri Shimbun (Japan) cited a North Korean defector who confirmed that, in 1996, Pakistan provided uranium enrichment technology in return for the production of nuclear arms.

3. India Nuclear Program

India delayed tests of the surface-to-surface Agni III missile (range 3,000 km) to January 2004, but did test-fire the anti-ship supersonic BrahMos (PJ-10) cruise missile (range 300 km). A Hindustan Times editorial cites the success of the BrahMos program as heralding stronger Indo-Russo military and technical cooperation. Hindustan Times (India) reports that a the former chairman and managing director of the Nuclear Corporation of India took up an assignment in Iran after his retirement; it is believed that he helped Iran build technical and physical infrastructure for its nuclear power plants.

4. Analysis

Praful Bidwai (Frontline, India) characterizes both Indian and Pakistani leaders, under the guise of self-defense, as "sleepwalking towards a nuclear confrontation." In a Daily Times (Pakistan) opinion piece, M.V. Ramana reminds of the perspective of the common person: "arms races and the expenditure of scarce resources on weapons brings no benefits, only the diversion of money from real needs like health and education."

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. New Peace Initiative?

In response to India's proposed 12-point plan for peace, Pakistan broadly accepted the initiative, returning with its own set of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and emphasizing that the "cancerous and poisonous issue" of Kashmir must also be resolved. India announced it would continue with 3 of the 12 CBMs: augment the capacity of the Delhi-Lahore bus, allowance of pedestrian crossings at Wagah for seniors, and provision of advanced medical treatment for Pakistani children.

["India initiates action on three CBMs"](#)

In addition to the US, Britain, China, Japan, and France welcomed India's proposal for normalization of ties with Pakistan. "Nations hail India's peace initiative"

Defense Minister George Fernandes has said that Pakistan is "too small a country for [India] to be afraid," in an interview with the BBC. Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Masood Khan said that India is "holding a gun in one hand and in the other hand a piece of 12 proposals. We do not understand the motives...only psychopaths and warmongers can make such comments." In a

carefully-worded statement, New Delhi voiced disappointment with Islamabad's response to some of New Delhi's proposals (calling it "impractical and extraneous"), but welcomed the fact that Islamabad had responded positively to at least some others. Praful Bidwai (Jang, Pakistan) makes the case that, in spite of tenuous moves ahead, "we must accept that there could be more than one pathway to India-Pakistan reconciliation" beyond summit-level talks, such as incremental steps towards dialogue.

In the daily Jang (Pakistan), Imtiaz Alam concludes that "when diplomacy is reduced to point-scoring or a half-cunning trick, then the outcome cannot be different from what has been happening in the last six months." Also in Jang, Moonis Ahmar explains why India and Pakistan only take "cosmetic" measure toward peace: "The mafias in the two countries tend to be so strong that they make sure not to take practical steps which could result in a change in the status quo and the loss of their power and privileges which they have accumulated as a result of decades of confrontation." C. Raja Mohan (Hindu, India) maintains that India must be ready with another set of moves, should Pakistan's reaction be negative: "If India's emerging strategy towards Pakistan might be called "positive unilateralism", the core assumption underlying it must be that New Delhi will not take "no" for an answer from Islamabad." In the same paper, Pratap Bhanu Mehta argues that faced with such challenges as finding "a credible monitoring mechanism to ensure that the Pakistan is indeed not responsible for any acts of violence that might take place even after a Pakistani crackdown...[there must be] a political culture in both India and Pakistan that understands that nationalism is the enemy of the national interest...[and] is prepared to pay a short run price for a new architecture for the subcontinent."

["India's positive unilateralism"](#)

["Warming relations?"](#)

2. US Perspective

India received congratulations from both the White House and the US State Dept., regarding the 12-point peace package offered to Pakistan. On the topic of US counterterrorism policy on the subcontinent, Asst. Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca testified that "Pakistan has taken many steps to curb infiltration, but we are asking it to redouble its efforts." The chairman of the committee, however, challenged Rocca's characterization of Pakistan's capacities: "...more needs to be done to ensure that the Pakistani military and intelligence forces are committed to preventing Jihadis from carrying out their attacks in Afghanistan and Kashmir." Rocca said that neither India nor Pakistan is correct on their respective positions on Kashmir: "The fault is to be found on both sides."

3. News & Reports

Border guards at Wagah exchanged sweets and pleasantries, a rare sight where soldiers from either side exchange menacing gestures at closing ceremonies each day. Several connections wait to reestablish between India and Pakistan, such as ambassadorial meetings and train track construction.

A team of Pakistani experts which visited the Baglihar power project in Jammu and Kashmir has reportedly concluded that the project violated the 1960 Indus Water Treaty between the two countries. The Indian Army announced that it would retain forward posts along the Line of Control (LoC), which are usually vacated during the harsh winter.

4. In-depth Analysis

In Arms Control Today (US), Feroz Hassan Khan posits the "independence-dependence paradox" in

South Asia: [India and Pakistan] "have attempted to wean themselves from outside support by using nuclear weapons. But this strategy has ironically served to make them more dependent on other powers who are forced to mitigate the consequences of this arms race. No other country has played a more crucial role than the United States." The Council on Foreign Relations released a report that outlines the potential US role to "assist -- not to mediate or arbitrate" the Kashmir dispute, as well as for the US to pressure India and Pakistan into the international nuclear nonproliferation regime and to encourage the two countries to implement stricter nuclear technology export controls. The report also recommends policies for improving bilateral relations with each country to address US security concerns in the region.

["CFR Report: U.S. Must Make South Asia a High Foreign Policy Priority or Face Crises in the Region"](#)

Pakistan

1. Law & Order

Police detained Javed Hashmi, president of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) and acting head of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), on charges of abetting mutiny. In his defense, Hashmi believes he is being targeted because of publicizing corruption within the military. Shafqat Mahmood (Jang, Pakistan) writes that the "arrest of such a figure is a clear testament to the limits of our democracy." Mahmood continues, "By taking such a harsh action against Javed Hashmi, General Musharraf is only displaying his own sensitivity or weakness when it comes to matters concerning the army." In regards to simultaneously holding both the positions of President and Chief of Army Staff, Musharraf was quoted (Daily Times, Pakistan) as saying, "I will take a decision to separate the two offices once I feel the political and economic situation in the country is stable." Mubashir Zaidi (Indian Express, India) contends that Pakistan is a "sham democracy," since "thousands of retired and serving military officials [have been] working on civilian posts since the military coup of October 1999."

["Javed Hashmi arrested"](#)

["Pakistan silences out-of-step politician"](#)

Fasih Ahmed (Daily Times, Pakistan) reports on the shift of money transfer from informal (through hawalas) to formal (banks) channels. Moody's Investors Service raised Pakistan's credit rating, noting that increased remittances and robust exports have bolstered the country's reserves for making debt payments.

2. Foreign Affairs

Speaking to Dutch multinational companies (Shell, Phillips, P&O Nedlloyd, and the ABN Amro Bank), Interior Minister Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat assured company representatives that Pakistan will make efforts to "provide physical as well as psychological comfort and security to the foreigners living in Pakistan" by installing surveillance cameras at strategic places in Islamabad and all four provincial capitals. Pakistan continued defense talks with Turkey, and opened bilateral dialogue with Brazil, for the first time in almost two decades.

["Accord on joint defence projects: Turkey, Pakistan end talks"](#)

["Dialogue with Brazil to open today"](#)

["Surveillance cameras to be installed soon: Faisal"](#)

Pakistan and China signed an extradition treaty to exchange prisoners, a deal which will likely be formalized during Musharraf's visit to China later this week. Both countries' defense officials

reiterated their commitment to collaboration, citing the jointly developed JF-17 jet fighter.

["Islamabad, Beijing to boost defence ties"](#)

3. Iranian-Pakistani Relations

Dawn (Pakistan) reports that Iran has offered to study the feasibility of a pipeline to Pakistan while Pakistan offered its expertise on building a network of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) stations. Kamul Matinuddin (Jang, Pakistan) argues that "with the threat from across our eastern border [ed: India] unlikely to go away in the near future Pakistan must secure its western borders by having friendly relations with both Afghanistan and Iran." A Daily Times (Pakistan) editorial makes a similar case for improving relations with Tehran: "The exasperation in Islamabad is that relations with Iran have become packaged in a regional shift in relations that it can't seem to manage successfully so far."

4. Opinions

Northwestern Frontier Province (NWFP) Chief Minister Akram Khan Durrani asserted that the September 11th attacks were a conspiracy, organized jointly by the CIA and "the Israeli intelligence service Mossad to start a war between Muslims and Christians," as quoted in an interview with Arnaud de Borchgrave of United Press International (UPI). A Lin Neumann (Asia Times, Hong Kong) interviews in person one of the "famed radical mullahs of Islam," a Sindh provincial secretary general of the JUI, who defends the growth of madrassas as a necessity for development and endorses the idea that "the war that Bush has launched is against all Muslims."

["An American meets a mullah"](#)

Anwar Kemal (Daily Times, Pakistan) criticizes an opinion piece by Bernard-Henri Levy's in the Washington Post ("Doubts About an Ally"): "A rational explanation for the author's visceral forays into the realm of speculation, rumor-mongering and scandal, which he has endeavored to pass off as investigative reporting, poses an intellectual challenge. What Pakistan has done to earn Mr. Levy's undying malice must remain a puzzle which he alone can help resolve." Leon Hadar of the Cato Institute (US) suggests that "while the US should work with Pakistan in the economic arena, it should refrain from embracing the Musharraf regime as an ally."

India

1. News & Reports

A Christian Science Monitor (US) report examines the consistency of application of POTA, particularly in the case of Syed Abdul Geelani and 3 others, who were detained in the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament. Republished from the South Asia Intelligence Review, Saji Cherian talks about the reform of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), and concludes that it "needs improvements and changes in certain clauses, but such changes should not be driven by transient political compulsions." Under POTA, police arrested a suspect, with possible Lashkar--Taiba links, for the Mumbai bomb blasts (at Gateway of India and Zaveri Bazaar) that killed 53 and injured over 100 people.

["India's 'Patriot Act' comes under scrutiny"](#)

Ajay Kumar (OneWorld, UK) reports that vigilante mobs in Bihar have blinded six alleged criminals over the course of a month. A Hindustan Times (India) editorial castigates police abuse, and in the most recent case, people protested a fatal beating as the "open secret of custodial deaths spilled out

into the streets."

2. Law & Order

Two articles from Frontline (India) discuss foiled protest attempts by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Sukumar Muralidharan calls the VHP's "propaganda program in Ayodhya...part of the Sangh Parivar's pre-election mobilization," though it failed "as Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav [took] a stern but tactful stand." Purnima Tripathi describes how the BJP can no longer extract election gains from the temple issue. A Hindustan Times (India) editorial calls the VHP "enemies of peace." Inder Malhotra (Hindu, India) marks sources of future communal instability, namely, the VHP's belief that it is "above the law" and the VHP leadership threatening violent mobilization. Police banned VHP leader Praveen Togadia from distributing tridents ("trishuls," as they are known) in the state of Tamil Nadu.

["VHP's specious logic"](#)

In an opinion piece, Bhaskar Ghose (Hindustan Times, India) notes that a recent Supreme Court decision shook "the Gujarat government out of its smug belief that it could determine what sort of justice they would seek for the victims of the post-Godhra murders, the belief that it could fiddle with statements, or not record them at all, have witnesses threatened, or do nothing when they were."

3. Military Affairs

Swapan Dasgupta argues that there are long-term strategic consequences of India refusing to send troops to Iraq: "The biggest setback, however, is likely to stem from the larger failure of the neocons to push the Sinophobia agenda further...India was nevertheless an unintended beneficiary of the American wariness of Chinese power." Ravi Sharma (Frontline, India) describes the joint Indo-US maritime exercises against the backdrop of US pressure on India to send troops to Iraq.

India will contribute \$300 million to the European Union's Galileo global satellite system, which stands to compete with the US' Global Positioning System. Defense Minister George Fernandes signed a defense agreement during his trip to the Czech Republic, which may involve the Indian army training Czech soldiers. In the Hindu (India), C. Manmohan Reddy emphasizes the need for a strategic review of India's national defense capabilities, in light of India's growing military aspirations.

["Strategic defence review"](#)

4. Foreign Affairs

C. Raja Mohan (Hindu, India) is hopeful of progress in the border talks, as he discusses the historical and political variables in favor of and opposed to the resolution. On the other hand, Wasbir Husain (Outlook, UK) scrutinizes the factors within the Sikkim territory, namely the Bhutia-Lepcha community's fears and apprehensions. Husain warns, "as some Bhutia-Lepcha leaders have said, none but the Indian Government would be responsible should a section of their agitators give up the democratic form of the movement, following the example set by other States in India's Northeast, to take up guns." The construction of the Three Gorges Dam, according to Claude Arpi (Rediff, US), involves two components that make India very nervous: first, the diversion of the Brahmaputra River, and second, the potential Chinese induction of a Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE).

["Sino-Indian boundary talks"](#)

The US offered to help India design, build, and possibly fund a crude oil storage plan.

5. Sudanese Oil Sector Deal

The international arm of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) of India secured a deal to lay a crude oil pipeline from Khartoum to Port Sudan. The ONGC is also stepping up its previous investment in Sudan, by pouring US \$1 billion dollars into the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company. Sudan supported India's candidacy for a position on the UN Security Council and India extended a line of credit of US \$50 million dollars to contribute to Sudan's economic development. The Hindustan Times (India) reports that 19 people were killed when a helicopter inexplicably crashed in Western Sudan.

Jammu & Kashmir (J&K)

1. Talks with Kashmiri Political Groups

While accepting the Indian central government's offer of discussions, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) said it would need time to build consensus among its constituents "within and outside." In response to Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's comments that the talks would be about decentralization of power, Mirwaiz Umer Farooq expressed willingness to engage with the central government, as long as it was on the right set of issues: "We will not talk for power or chief minister's chair or subsidy. Jammu and Kashmir is a half-a-century-old dispute which needs to be resolved according to the wishes and aspirations of its people." Maulvi Abbas Ansari, head of the moderate faction of the Hurriyat, excused the comments as said in the context of upcoming elections and vowed to move forward with the discussion.

Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar offered 100 scholarships for Kashmiri students in Pakistan's professional institutions, treatment for disabled Kashmiris, and assistance for widows and victims of rape.

2. News

Suspended Delhi University lecturer Syed Abdul Rehman Geelani was released after being acquitted him in the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. He criticized the judiciary and police and alleged that several attempts were made on his life during his 23-month imprisonment. Kashmiris observed a "black day" to mark the anniversary of the establishment of Indian forces in Kashmir. Chairman Ansari said that "Indian forces had arrived in Kashmir as a security force, but gradually became an occupying force," he said, urging India to "respect the urges and aspirations of Kashmiris." Meanwhile, hard-line leader Syed Ali Geelani, who heads a breakaway faction of the Hurriyat, was put under temporary house arrest. J&K Chief Minister (CM) Mufti Mohammad Sayeed had formulated a comprehensive plan to bring back the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community: "A majority of migrants, desirous to return to the Valley, have enlisted themselves and it is our endeavor to resettle them."

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) rejected a call by several politicians for a unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan. During the first few days of Ramzan, however, 15 people, including five army soldiers, were killed and 59 wounded, in violence across Jammu and Kashmir. Nineteen militants surrendered to security forces, a rare occurrence in J&K. A Press Trust of India (PTI) cites the Pakistani monthly The Herald reporting that militant outfits have changed their names, but not much else. Indian forces killed a senior commander of the militant outfit Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Saiful Rahman. Police recovered improvised explosive devices (IEDs) laden with 30 kilograms of RDX (also referred to as cyclonite or hexogen), a powerful chemical ingredient in

military high explosives.

3. Reports

In the Asia Times (Hong Kong), Siddharth Srivastava reports that an all-female outfit with cells in J&K, Dukhtaran-e-militat (DeM), has become increasingly active in the recent past, providing logistical support, such as housing and food to actual militants. The two women suspected of being behind the Mumbai blasts, however, are believed to be members of the DeM. Ashima Kaul (Hindustan Times, India) writes about the meaning of more female militants for the cause of women's rights: "It's a pity that women who insist on following ideologies laid by men or who support violent strategies to achieve these goals are in no way working for the concerns of their sex." India refuted Pakistan's allegations that the army is mistreating its women.

["Indian terror no longer just a man's game"](#)

In citing a recent case involving Yasin Malik, chief of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and a young couple found smuggling \$100,000 into J&K, Neelesh Misra of the Associated Press (AP) explains that "Indian police contend the money given to separatist politicians is funneled to militant wings of their parties, or other groups. But top politicians are often not arrested for fear it could lead to more unrest among Kashmiris. Separatist politicians say they are not arrested or convicted due to a lack of evidence." Pakistani daily Dawn quotes an European Union (EU) delegation member on a recent visit to J&K: "India is portraying the situation of Kashmir which is quite obstructive, negative and deceitful."

["Indian media wrongly projecting Kashmir: EU"](#)

4. Opinions & Analysis

Harish Khare (Hindu, India) argues that "a professional body of separatist leaders - consisting of the political and religious leaders, hired guns, pens for hire, and human rights activists - has monopolized the popular discourse in the Kashmir valley" and "manufactures ideas and emotions, which influence and determine how the Kashmiris think [about their injustices]." Ayaz Amir (Gulf News, United Arab Emirates) believes Pakistan should hold its position on Kashmir, namely, that there should be "no turning the [LoC] into an international frontier...there is going to be no Kashmir solution now or in the next hundred years."

["Obligations of peace in Kashmir"](#)

Bulbul Roy Mishra (Indian Express, India) asserts that CM Sayeed abandon his "healing touch" policy in favor of the reality that "Pakistan is close to bankruptcy, [but] the ISI is rich. The nexus between drug money and terrorism is no secret." A Daily Excelsior (Kashmir) editorial condemns the killings that began the holy month of Ramzan, violating "an unwritten understanding between [the militants] and the security forces that there should be no violence during the month of fasting." In the same paper, an opinion piece by M.L. Kotru calls the newly-built Pahalgam amusement park "amusing," since "apart from the outlandishness of the project, that the locals simply cannot afford to buy admission tickets."

Al Qaeda & Pak-Afghan Border

1. Al Qaeda

After the interrogation of three other suspected Al Qaeda operatives, Pakistani authorities arrested foreign Al Qaeda suspects in Rawalpindi and Faisalabad, where police claim to be "gradually

unraveling a financial trail that also sees donations coming in from key Faisalabad businessmen.

["Al Qaeda man held in Faisalabad"](#)

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the US confirmed that two agents were killed in an ambush near the Pakistan border. A US soldier died in a clash in which US-led forces killed nearly two dozen members of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, in a district of Paktika, a southeastern province. In another Paktika district, US and Afghan forces killed at least 20 other members of the Taliban.

["Two CIA men killed in Afghanistan"](#)

["20 Taliban, Al Qaeda men killed"](#)

2. Pak-Afghan Border Operations

A tripartite commission of Afghan, Pakistani, and US diplomats visited the Durand Line to work toward a mutually agreed-upon boundary. Mujahid Ali (Gulf News, United Arab Emirates) reports that Taliban remnants openly roam the streets of Quetta, easily returning across the border to check on families and help fight US-led forces. According to the Northwestern Frontier Province (NWFP) Governor, Pakistan has taken security measures along the border to check undesirable and undocumented border crossings. He claimed that operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATAs) have "tremendously improved...the law and order situation," dispelling rumors about resurging Al Qaeda activity or Afghan-Pakistani military hostilities as a figment of media exaggerations. A Pakistani military spokesperson said, "...but a lot more needs to be done as the border is vast, the terrain inhospitable and we have few resources." Some government officials feel that FATA operations continue "just to please the Americans." In response to such opposition from the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), Pakistan's Information Minister emphasized the importance of continuing Pakistan's FATA operations. On the southwestern border with Afghanistan, Pakistani authorities seized an arms cache of rockets, mortars, and bullets.

["Pakistani, Afghan, US officials visit border"](#)

["Operation in Fata to continue, NA told"](#)

3. US Involvement in "Pashtunistan"?

Two unsubstantiated reports chronicle US involvement in an emerging Pashtun nationalist movement. Martin Walker (United Press International, US) alleges that "America's critics in the Pakistani government are complaining that Washington's dark influence is behind new agitation for the creation of 'Pashtunistan' -- an attempt to unite the Pashtun tribes divided by the Afghan-Pakistani frontier." Syed Saleem Shazad (Asia Times, Hong Kong) echoes the destabilizing nature of the reported relationship, claiming that his "sources close to Pakistan strategic circles report that there has been recent contact between Afghan leader Hamid Karzai and Pashtun leader Khan Abdul Wali Khan, much to the alarm of the Pakistani hierarchy, which is convinced that the meeting took place at the instigation of the US."

["'Pashtunistan' issue back to haunt Pakistan"](#)

Afghanistan

1. Political Affairs

Afghanistan unveiled a draft constitution, which gives the country the official name "The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," and a presidential system of government, in which the president will directly elected by the people. According to a statement by the commission, the draft constitution "is based on Islamic principles and recognizes that no law can be contrary to the sacred religion of

Islam." The Afghan Refugees Committee will elect its representatives for the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December. In an open letter, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged President Karzai to "minimize the number of warlords and their proxies" at the upcoming Loya Jirga.

According to Ahmad Nahim Qadiri (Institute for War and Peace Reporting, UK), Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali announced that two factions, those of previously-warring Generals Abdul Rashid Dostum and Atta Mohammed, will merge and join the Afghan National Army. Jalali said, "We have brought in these changes so as to gain the satisfaction and confidence of the people. I am sure the decisions will be implemented, and that they will be for the benefit of the people of the north." Pamela Constable (Washington Post, republished in Dawn) cites challenges in depoliticizing the Afghan armed forces and premature disarmament as obstacles to improving Afghanistan's security situation.

["Obstacles to Afghan reforms persist: Overhaul in defence apparatus"](#)

2. International Organizations (UN, NATO, & ISAF)

According to a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) annual report, Afghanistan produces 75% of the world's opium and production has risen 6% over last year's crop. The UNODC executive director said, "Either major surgical drug-control measures are taken now, or the drug cancer in Afghanistan will keep spreading, metastasize into corruption, violence and terrorism." A lieutenant in the Afghan army was arrested for smuggling raw opium, a sign of the potential growth of a drug-subsidized military and Taliban resurgence, according to Scott Baldauf (Christian Science Monitor, US). The UN launched its Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program to gradually reduce the military power and political influence of factionalized armed warlords by trading their guns for new job opportunities.

["Afghan military tied to drug trade"](#)

The UN reports that over 1.9 million Afghanis have repatriated from Pakistan since the beginning of the program, although the Daily Times quotes a commissioner for refugees as expecting 20 to 30 percent repatriated refugees to return to Pakistan due to insecurity in Afghanistan. A North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) spokesperson said, "But the challenge for NATO is not Iraq, the challenge for NATO is making a success of Afghanistan." The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Commander warned against attacks on soft targets: "Threats are not only directed against the Afghan transitional authorities or an assistance force like ISAF but what we call soft targets, and that means elements of the UN or even, as we unfortunately had to witness in Baghdad, against the International Red Cross." The Christian Science Monitor's Scott Baldauf chronicles one organization's determination to continue its anti-landmine work, amidst increasing attacks on aid workers, leaving many aid groups wondering "whether a good deed is worth a person's life."

["Aid groups in Afghanistan weigh good deeds vs. safety"](#)

3. International Affairs

Aslam Effendi (Jang, Pakistan) concludes that tribal and ethnic unity must precede the employment of the country's disparate natural resources and hence, its dependence on foreign aid. Two US Senators warned about the instability of Afghanistan and that its collapse looms over the newly appointed ambassador to Kabul, Zalmay Khalilzad: "We are in jeopardy of losing Afghanistan to become a failed state again." The French Army Chief visited Kabul to hold talks with President Karzai, former King Zahir Shah, and commander of the new Afghan National Army. A Chinese construction company will rebuild three major highways in north Afghanistan under a World Bank-funded project. Afghanistan and Britain signed a trade agreement, particularly for British firms to invest in the oil and gas sector.

["French army chief visits Afghanistan"](#)

["Afghanistan, Britain strike trade deal"](#)

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